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CHILDREN'S CIVIC ACTIVITIES

NECESSARY FACTOR IN THE NEW CIVILIZATION

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While two-thirds of the world are in a death grapple between monarchy and democracy, our President declares that we, too, against our will, may any instant be drawn into the devastating conflict; he demands that we open our eyes to the fact that we are unprepared to defend our lives, our liberties and our homes, and that with all haste we must do whatever is within our power to save what we can from the calamity of invasion, should this befall us.

We can drill and we can arm—if there are enough arms for the purpose; lasting preparedness, however, goes back of all this. There is a civic weakness that must be eradicated, and strength built in its place. Let us who can see this, do what we can, and when we are fully successful, the United States of the World will guard every country from invasion, and the very object of war and invasion will have vanished.

Early in the last century when tyranny was trembling on its throne, the King of Prussia appealed to the great Baron von Humboldt, who replied "Whatever you want in the state, you must first put into the schools." The King acted on this advice, and every child was taught that he, his property and his life belonged to the King, and that he must drill constantly to make himself efficient to the last degree. Is it not possible for us to *see* as did the great scientist, and to *act* for the defense of our liberties as practically, resolutely, and persistently as the Hohenzollerns have done to extend their dominion? Our lives, our liberties and our possessions may be and are jeopardized and invaded whether a military army lands on our shores or not.

Two Civic Questions

Large masses of men in Ohio, Massachusetts and other states, have, within the past few years, been convicted of selling their

votes for money. The great body of college graduates, with many individual exceptions, take no part in local civic affairs. The men who attend local primaries and local elections are chiefly those who left the schools before they reached the seventh grade, where they might get some instruction regarding the history of our country and the duties of citizenship, and consequently have no foundation on which to stand and defend themselves against grogshop or machine politics. Boss-rule in many of our cities and elsewhere is always in power or certain to be restored after a rare and brief interruption, like hazing and cribbing in some of our educational institutions. Our prisons and reformatories are crowded. Special privileges and race and sex distinctions in civic rights, with all their injustice and harm, have not yet been wiped out, after a hundred and forty years of independence of our great republic. The spirit and the form of government in our schools is that of monarchy. Our whole people, while they are forming their habits of thinking and acting, are trained to be irresponsible subjects of a monarchy, in which they have no part except to submit, with no appeal. This is not a mere negative, but a positive, corrupting evil. Democracy in America is not the full and unqualified success that we would be glad to acclaim it. What is the reason for these conditions? And what is the means of improving them?

The Answer

The process of growth of the Anglo-Saxon demand for liberty that resulted in the Magna Charta, and in America in our war for independence, came gradually to an end in the United States, following the Revolutionary War, as a result of the general introduction of the steam engine and machinery, which separated men from their families, during the active working hours of the day, and left the children more and more time not used in work with their parents.

Previous to this, ninety-seven to ninety-eight per cent of our people lived under rural conditions, the girls and little boys working with their mothers, and the larger boys with their fathers. In this continual close contact, the children took on their parents' habits, character, knowledge, religion, political creed and both social and civic activities. But this process came to an end, and the children's time has been absorbed by the schools.

Our statesmen and educators did not realize what was happen-

ing to our whole population through the schools. They made the fearful mistake of believing that knowledge is the price of liberty. They lacked the vision of thousands of years ago, that *vigilance* is the price of liberty. They were not sufficiently vigilant themselves, to discover that the ancient monarchical tyranny of school government, fastened on every individual from his babyhood till his schooling came to an end, made of him a subject of a government in which he had no part except to obey an arbitrary master, rather than to be a responsible citizen, learning to make and to enforce obedience to law, and to respect his own and others' rights, and to defend them.

In the schools we train our people in abject subjection to a monarchical government and confirm them in the habits and character of subjects and then expect them at the age of twenty-one to be and to act as free-born, independent citizens of a democracy. This is as outrageously stupid as if we were to scrupulously guard every person lest he should ever get into the water, and then, at the age of twenty-one dump him into the middle of Hudson River and tell him to swim for the shore. Here is the answer to that first question, "What is the reason for the present bad social and civic conditions of our country, and our state of unpreparedness to defend our lives, our liberties, our homes, and our sacred honor?" Does it not answer the question, "What must we do?"

Train for Citizenship

Any vital, permanent improvement in civilization must rest on an improvement in the habits and character of the whole people.

It is utterly impossible to reform the habits of a great body of adults. But now that the public school system is rapidly developing throughout the world, it is entirely practicable to enable the children, from the very beginning, to form those habits of citizenship upon which depend the internal and international peace and welfare of the family of nations.

This work among the children cannot, however, be accomplished by the old-fashioned academic method. It must be by action, not by committing information to memory to pass examinations. The laboratory method must replace the academic, and the part of the teacher must be to point the way to action, rather than grill the child and stuff its memory. Democratic government

under instruction, must replace the monarchical school government. This does not mean that the teacher's responsibility and authority to maintain order and attention to the work of the school are in the slightest curtailed. However, the teacher's skill and tact will be exhibited by the extent to which the children's democracy succeeds in making an exhibition of the teacher's authority unnecessary.

It is a simple matter to conduct a school as a republic, training the pupils to solve the problems of their daily life and conduct, always guided by the Golden Rule, as they do the problems of arithmetic, guided by the correct rules of mathematics. The children like the responsibility, and it is pleasant for the teacher.

The School Republic

The children of a school-room are made citizens of a republic, which may have the form of a village, town, county, city or other political unit. This little republic is given legislative, executive and judicial powers, all under instruction of the teacher, whose sanction is needed to validate the children's work. This does not in the slightest interfere with right action by the pupils, except that in some cases the teacher's judgment may be incorrect—this risk, which is not serious, we must take. The children legislate in relation to their own conduct, elect officers at short intervals to enforce their laws, and others to adjudicate difficulties. The plan is elastic, so that there are no two schools that make the application in exactly the same way. It may be exceedingly simple, with only three officers, or more developed, according to circumstances. Several school-room republics may be joined in a school state, several states in a national government, and several of these in an international government.

The pedagogical, moral and civic results of the school republic are excellent. The United States government has tested it on a large scale, and with most satisfactory results, in Cuba and elsewhere. After several years' test of it in Alaska, the United States Bureau of Education made it a necessary part of the curriculum of the government schools in Alaska, these being the only schools under the direct authority of this bureau.

The following testimony is conclusive as to the social and polit-

ical importance of this form of democracy as an educational force in the schools:

In 1913 Major General Leonard Wood wrote the following concerning his experience with the school republic in Cuba:

The results were most satisfactory; indeed they were so satisfactory that I unhesitatingly commend the idea as worthy of the most serious consideration. The results were far-reaching and valuable, and are fully set forth in my various reports as military governor of Cuba and the reports of the officials at the head of the public school system of the island.

This system would, I believe, be especially valuable in all schools, and would result in our children being much better equipped for the discharge of their civic responsibilities.

April 15, 1914, General Wood wrote the chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs:

I am confident it is a system well worth trying out in our insular possessions, teaching as it does discipline and being founded on a habitual submission to the majority, a mental condition which is absolutely essential to the establishment of any form of self-government.

On the same day (April 15) General Wood said to a group of officers of the General Staff:

If Mexico had had the school republic in all her schools for ten years, as we have had it for two years in Cuba, the present troubles would never have arisen.

Judge Ben B. Lindsey, than whom there is no higher authority in such matters, says:

I am one of those in a peculiar position to appreciate the value of the school republic. When this idea is properly presented and applied it at once becomes a wonderful contribution to good citizenship. I do not know a better wish that I could make for our children than to wish A New Citizenship the widest possible circulation.

Walter C. Shields, superintendent for the Department of the Interior of the northwest district of Alaska, wrote at Nome, October 27, 1913:

This winter I expect to see the school republic in operation in all the schools in the district. I wish you could see how splendidly it is adapted to our needs here.

The following is an extract from the official report received by the United States Commissioner of Education November 30, 1914, from Wainwright, on the Arctic coast of Alaska:

The school republic has done wonders for these scholars. They grew by leaps and bounds in self-confidence and overcame their false timidity and fear of being heard. Every Friday afternoon meeting was an improvement on the preceding one, until they would conduct their meetings in parliamentary order without my assistance. They made and executed their own laws, elected their own officers for a period of one month, salaried and paid them weekly. At first they had to be told every move to make and were afraid to speak in an audible tone, but by patient effort such difficulties were overcome.

I append the following rules and penalties, officers and their duties, etc., which will give you a general idea of our working basis. These could be profitably commented upon. Now, this, simple as it may seem, has accomplished wonders in this school this year in many ways. Industry, cleanliness, economy, good deportment, self-reliance, punctuality, neatness, obedience, appreciation, honesty, truthfulness, kindness, and kindred admirable traits have come to the front. In fact, it has straightened matters out in general. We don't see how we could well have gotten along without it.

In the commissioner's report on Alaska (Dec., 1914), appears, on page 36, the following:

District Superintendent W. C. Shields sent a pamphlet on self-government, by Wilson L. Gill, and said: "Adopt this for use and report your success." It was adopted. . . . Self-government had to be employed as a detail in school management. . . . The duties which the citizens were elected to perform were sufficiently numerous for each citizen to have a duty. . . . It was amusing to see a stubby little 12-year-old police officer bring to school a man-grown truant. The schoolroom was kept open from 9 a. m. till 8 p. m. every day; when school was not in session the schoolroom served as a sort of club-room. One or more of the police officers was always present, and the room was always orderly. Citizens might read, write, sew, play games, or do whatever they liked, but they must never be idle.

The school republic seems to be the problem of school management solving itself. It increases school efficiency, adds enthusiasm, and answers the teacher's question, How shall I do without an assistant?

On page 38 of same report another teacher writes:

The innovation was of material assistance to the teacher.

Another teacher reports, on page 47:

The children like this new organization very much, indeed.

Louis P. Nash, head master of a Boston school district, made the following statement, after thirteen years' use of this method:

My experience and observation of the school republic is that it is altogether useful and not at all harmful. Its intellectual advantages are many. Its moral advantages are more considerable.

David Snedden, Massachusetts commissioner of education, has written:

The miniature school community becomes a miniature state, and the children learn to appreciate self-made laws and to contribute to their enforcement. I am profoundly convinced of the rightness of these ideas, and of the fact that they are in line with the best sociological thinking of our time.

Every teacher ought to be encouraged to use the civic laboratory method. It should be clearly understood that training for citizenship is not simply a matter of educational detail—rather a matter of public policy, of nation-building.¹

Preparedness has to do with the spirit of a people, not merely with arms and munitions. And when training for true democratic citizenship becomes part of the public policy of all countries, we may look for the old order to change. The advice is still good: whatever you want in the state you must first put in the schools.

Children's International State

The Children's International State, based on the practice of the Golden Rule, in all social, commercial, civic and international affairs is already in course of organizing. Those coöperating in this movement, are the Minister of Education and the Imperial Inspector of Schools of Japan; the Ambassador to the United States, the National Inspector of High Schools and other school men of Argentina; special Commissioners of Education from Sweden and from a central European government which we are not authorized to name; and a group of men and women in the United States, with good prospects in several other countries.

Citizens' Pledge of the Children's International State

We, the New Citizens, Builders of the World of Tomorrow, wish to have our world at peace. We wish for all people, health, happiness and intelligence; good manners, good morals and good fortune. We join hands from land to land and promise to do our best to serve the world, each in our own village, town, or city, each in our own dear country, and all together in the Children's International State.

¹Literature on this subject may be had from The American Patriotic League, Mt. Airy, Philadelphia.